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Hispanic Swing Vote Equals Political Power Equals Business $ $ $

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HispanicBUSINESS

The magazine for growth companies and ladder-oriented professionals

May 1990 Volume 12, Number 5

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From left: Nelson Carlo, Miriam Santos, Mayor Richard Daley, Virginia Ojeda, Luis V. Gutierrez, and George Muñoz.
Inset photo by Phillip Walker.

BPA MEMBERSHIP APPLIED FOR 1/90

In Chicago, political action starts in the schools. This axiom began to apply to the city's Hispanic constituency a decade ago when three Hispanics became school board members. Their power increased quickly when they became a buffer between the black and Anglo communities. Soon Hispanics were winning political offices.

Now the schools themselves are becoming a hotbed of political turmoil. With speed comparable to that of recent changes in Eastern Europe, the Illinois legislature has decentralized the administration of Chicago's schools. Never before in our nation's history has such a large scale decentralization been attempted. In October local councils took over each of the city's 541 public schools. The more than 5,000 new council members, approximately 1,000 of whom are Hispanic, have already made their presence felt.

Each council consists of 10 locally elected members—six parents, two teachers, and two community representatives. The legislature gave the new councils authority to approve budgets, determine curriculum, and hire and fire principals. Unfortunately, the legislature provided little training for the council members, no selection criteria, and few if any guidelines on their rights and responsibilities.

In fact, at the 276 schools where the councils were to decide the fate of the principals this year, 50 principals, or 18 percent, have been fired so far. Most of these are non-Hispanic principals in Hispanic neighborhoods with councils controlled by Hispanic parents, although Hispanic controlled councils have also voted out nine of the 16 Hispanic principals who have been fired so far.

Not surprisingly a lot of people are less than delighted. Some say the councils went too far too fast. In fact, the inevitable backlash has begun. Protests and picket lines are the order of the day.

Just as in Eastern Europe, many of these new leaders in Chicago come to their roles in democratic government with little experience. While Hispanic parents *clearly* must drive for control of their children's education, only time will tell whether the new councils will be able to meet their challenge.

More broadly, Chicago's political and business scene is the major focus of this, our first issue devoted to the nation's third largest city.

In terms of business, Hispanics are making important contributions to the new Chicago. Almost 5,000 of its businesses are Hispanic owned. Of these, we profile two in this issue: Art Velasquez's Azteca Foods, and Ernest and Virginia Ojeda's McDonald's franchises.

As for the political scene, Steve Bergsman paints Chicago's Hispanic politics with a broad brush, while Patrice Raia details the rise of one promising leader, Alderman Luis Gutierrez.

Although many believe Chicago still epitomizes big city politics, and even though the mayor's name is again Richard Daley, the Windy City has entered a new era.

Mayor Richard M. Daley, who appears on the cover of this issue along with five of Chicago's Hispanic leaders, is of a different generation from his father, Richard J. Daley, who took control of the city's political machine in 1955. Mayor Daley has proven adept at dealing with the city's changing demographic base. The Hispanic presence in Chicago clearly appears to be on the rise.

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she had unfair advantages because union staff employees allegedly helped in her campaign and a union newsletter subtly endorsed her through generous use of photographs and placement of articles.

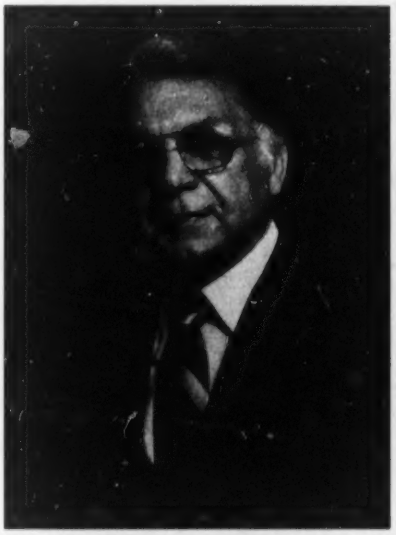
"I definitely feel her election is a step toward Latina representation, and that's important because minority women are the least represented group in labor's leadership levels," says Mr. Rodriguez, a part-time bartender. "However, her election comes tainted. The international pretty much designed the whole election process in her favor."

Ms. Durazo dismisses such charges as "sour grapes" and distant history. However, she did raise some eyebrows when she married Mr. Contreras, the international union's representative. Ms. Durazo says she should be judged not by her choice of husbands but by her performance as president of Local 11. "We both share a lot of the same beliefs," adds Mr. Contreras. "We see our union work as a cause—not a job."

Since the election, Ms. Durazo has been busy crystallizing both her own management style and her union's strategies and goals. Her key priority now is to strengthen the union's organizing efforts. But first she must organize her own staff. Owing to years of organizational dormancy within the union she must pursue this new thrust almost from the ground up. Her first administrative decisions centered on hiring a director who will organize rank-and-file leaders to recruit outside the union.

The second step has been to expand the union's research department, which now has two full-time staffers and relies on the international union's researchers. "With organizational and research departments in place, we'll basically then put together our best plans and strategies for the future," Ms. Durazo explains.

In addition, she intends to make sure that employers honor new language regarding seniority rights in the most recent contract (December, 1988). This language, Ms. Durazo says, is a major step to support promotions and broadening experiences for those who have paid their dues with long-standing jobs. "In other words," she adds, "the employers have to provide an opportunity to all the existing employees first—by posting openings, allowing bidding, and providing a 60-day trial period. That's important because we need more Latinos in higher positions."



When Maria Elena Durazo has an idea, she always sticks to it, says Albert Hernandez, a labor union leader in Los Angeles.

Ms. Durazo's other top priorities are to improve training programs for the membership in an effort to upgrade their work, and to forge more alliances with other unions and community groups.

Ms. Durazo is acutely aware of her unique position as a woman and Hispanic in a "white-male dominated industry." "There isn't one single female general manager of a major hotel in this region," she says. Still, she doesn't find this a distraction or major obstacle. "It's simply not an open issue that people come out and talk about. I certainly don't make an issue out of it. That's just not the point. When a decision has to be made they know I'm the person that they have to talk to. They might try to get around it sometimes, but eventually they have to convince me. I think as long as they understand that, things will be OK."

The Trend in Hispanic Union Membership has Been Negative

While the number of Hispanics employed in the United States continued to rise last year, the percentage of Hispanics who are union members is edging downward, according to figures just released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Similar downward trends are apparent in the percentages of Anglos and blacks who are union members.

Year:	1987		1989	
Employment group*	Employed (000's)	% in union	Employed (000's)	% in union
HISPANICS	7,215	17.1	7,894	15.2
Women	2,900	12.9	3,184	12.6
Men	4,315	19.9	4,710	16.8
WHITES	85,525	16.3	88,622	15.7
Women	39,446	11.6	41,212	11.5
Men	46,079	20.4	47,410	19.3
BLACKS	10,838	22.6	11,470	22.2
Women	5,509	19.3	5,873	19.8
Men	5,329	25.9	5,597	24.8

**Adults 16 years of age and over.*

(Source: Data issued by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in January, 1990.)

NOTE

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